

OLD
SERVANTS

By OLIVER GREGORY

Occasioned by the Representation of the Farce
called *High Life below Stairs*, and by what
has been said to their Disadvantage in the
Public Papers.

“ I can hardly think in point of equity, that
“ long and faithful services, especially in great
“ and opulent families, ought to be put off with
“ the bare payment of stipulated wages; and
“ not some additional bounty bestowed, that
“ may contribute to the ease of an aged servant,
“ and bring his grey hairs with quiet to the grave.”

FIDELIS: Body of Divinity.

L O N D O N . —

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JUNE 12, 1760.

THIS little piece appeared in separate parts, last month, in the PUBLIC LEDGER; and as it was well received, the Author was induced to put it together, and to publish it in this manner, that any one might read it who has no opportunity of perusing that paper, and those who are principally concerned in the publication, might purchase it at a very moderate price.

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E R R A T A.

Page 7. lin. 13. for *on*, read *of*
— 10. lin. 5. after *bis*, add *report*
— 17. lin. 19. for *eat*, read *can*
— 20. lin. 16. for *many*, read *in any*
— — lin. 23. for *where*, read *whose*
— 23. lin. 20. instead of *servants*, read *servant*

A N

A P O L O G Y
FOR THE
S E R V A N T S.

NOTHING is so general or so frequent a subject of discourse, as the behaviour and character of servants: and contrary to all others, which have, for the most part, divided the sentiments of the world, this theme seems to have introduced an unanimity of opinion among mankind, who are agreed in an uni-

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versal

versal censure on those whose unhappy lot it is to be born to a state of servitude.

He must therefore be an hardy advocate, and not like to gain much reputation, who ventures to appear in a cause against which so strong a prejudice is conceived.

But for the sake of truth and justice, and with an abhorrence of railing and reviling, I have taken up this forlorn cause, and hope to say something in the following apology, that may take off that severity, which the reader, among many thousands, may have contracted against men of this humble calling, and reconcile him so far to the fraternity, as to induce him to think and speak of it with candour and humanity.

Possibly the public may be desirous to know who I am ; and if it be any satisfaction, I will tell them, that I am an old servant in the sixty-third year of my age, subsisting entirely on an annuity of twenty pounds a year, bequeathed to me by one of my masters ; whose son, a gentleman of honour and great goodness, is pleased to
revise

revise and correct these my coarse and homely labours.

I am led to this undertaking, not only in defence of the servants of this kingdom, but that I may have an opportunity of observing upon the weaknesses, inadvertencies, and misconduct of masters, which have been a fatal source of mischief to their dependants: and I am convinced it will be found that the behaviour of the latter, which has been censured with great vehemence, owes its rise, among other things, to the injudicious conduct of the former. These loose and unconnected thoughts of mine, therefore, may not only give satisfaction to the servants, but may be of use also to those of higher station, by shewing them some errors in their own behaviour.

At the same time that I am writing in the servants defence, and shall probably be read by all those who can read, who may also, if they please, communicate my sentiments to their more illiterate brethren, I must tell them that I shall not spare their faults, when they come in my way; but,

like an honest surgeon, probe them to the bottom.

They are not to look then on this little treatise as a cordial to raise their spirits, and to set them upon immediately abusing the family they live in ; but as a manual, to furnish them with some honest answers, and modest excuses, to be urged occasionally in their own behalf.

Let it be understood, therefore, that I am not writing in defence of any servants, but those who are honest and sober ; such as are irreproachable in those great and necessary points, and not deficient in diligence, cleanliness, civility, and the like ; but who may possibly have, with these qualities, some faults and foibles of a lesser kind, which are equally to be overlooked both in servants and masters.

I profess to have nothing to say to sots, thieves, gamesters, corruptors of children, &c. of which there are infinite numbers in this great town, who live an everlasting disgrace to their profession, a scandal to all worthy families, and a reproach to civil government.

I write

I write to the honest, sober, diligent, cleanly servant, who has no other infirmities than his superiors ; and shall give him my thoughts, just as they occur to me, without any particular form or method ; assuring him at the same time, whether they are right or wrong, that I shall not take the trouble to defend them, should they be attacked by any hired writer in a two-penny paper, or any superficial critic in a shilling pamphlet.

I take the grand clamour against our profession to be levelled at our vails, rather than our morals. We should have a much greater number of friends and advocates, and fewer enemies, if we entered into service without looking for perquisites—but more of this by and by.

It was about three years ago that some gentlemen of rank and fortune entered into a kind of association, neither to give vails to the servants of others, nor to suffer their own to receive any ; but at the same time they raised their respective servants wages, as an equivalent for the loss they should sustain

sustain by this new regulation. Whether, when the wages were raised, the perquisites crept on again, or whether those gentlemen were sick of the burthen ; and so threw it back again on their friends, I cannot determine ; but it is certain this step, however well intended, has not produced any material reformation.

This year we have been under consideration again, and have made our appearance on the stage.—But however the author of *High Life Below Stairs* may pride himself in his satirical representation, I will venture to tell him, that *Low Life Above Stairs* would have made a much livelier scene, if it had been filled with as much wit and humour, as it had scandal and obscenity.

There is a storm too gathering against us in the north. The gentry in Scotland, we are told, are taking away their servants drink money ; which I suppose answers to our vails, and is what the extravagant spend, and the frugal servants lay up to support them in their old age. I know not what may be the end of this proceeding ; but I hope, and so does

does every true Englishman, whether in livery, or out of livery, never to see the day, when Scotland is to dictate to *England* either in religion, politicks, or œconomicks.

Besides these attacks, we have had several little strokes given us in the news-papers, which are scarce worthy our notice, being intended, I suppose, to fill the paper in a scarcity of foreign or domestic news.

Before I speak of vails and perquisites, let me remark the want of candour and liberality that is apparent in mankind, with respect to their opinions on the characters of servants; and observe how often that vice, fault, folly and foible, which is censured in the servant, is notorious and glaring in the conduct of the master.

Dick Brush and I began the world together; he was one of the finest fellows that ever wore a livery; he was handsome, genteel, sensible, and well-bred: with all these agreeable qualities, he was distinguished for his sobriety, fidelity, neatness, and diligence. He was the admiration of his fellow servants; beloved by the women, respected by the men; and the best friend and adviser in the

the world to all young servants. Dick was used to say to me whenever he heard a servant was dismissed for a foible : “ Oliver, I will hold a bottle of wine that his master has the same fault, or a worse.” When he happened to be out of place himself, and I recommended him to Mr. Such-a-one’s Service ; — “ Can I have a good character of him ? ” says Dick.—He was a zealous friend to his brethren ; and oftentimes used to say with much pleasantry, that there were some of the greatest men in the kingdom that wore liveries—“ Let me tell you gentlemen, says he, one night at the club, I held it the basest thing in life for masters to abuse their servants, good, honest, faithful, worthy servants, because they have this or that fault, when they themselves are more culpable even in that very respect. When I lived in the Temple, I have been cursed for shutting the door a little too hard, when my judicious master has done nothing all the morning but play upon the hautboy. I have been scolded for sneezing at dinner; when my master the whole time has been coughing and expectorating. I have been kicked for a pert answer, and told with half a dozen oaths

oaths, that I ought to speak decently. These are things which no man of spirit can submit to ; and rather than serve so self interested and partial a master, I would even enter into the service of an apothecary, where I am to beat the mortar, carry out medicines, and wear a livery that never was made for me. " If you please, gentlemen, continued Dick, let us make it our busines to find out what our masters opinions of us are, and report it this day month to the club : I'll be hanged if you don't all think with me." This proposal was unanimously agreed to ; we met accordingly, and Dick being in the chair, desired we would relate in order what we had collected on the subject; and, as his right hand man, he addressed himself first to me. I rose up, and, with great respect to the chair, told them, I had the pleasure to find that my master had but one very material objection to me. " Oliver, I have overheard him to say to a friend, is a very good servant ; but he brings me in confounded bills, and such a variety of articles too ; it is an enormous sum that I pay the fellow for one trumpery thing or other :" What business is your master of ? says the

chairman. I bowed respectfully, and answered an attorney at law—Mr. Chairman then gave a nod, and a wink, and the company joined in a laugh.—He then called upon Mr. Samuel, to give his fairly without reserve. “ I live, says Samuel, with a gentleman who says I have but one fault, and that I should be the best servant in the world if I was not conceited ; he often says he believes I cannot be matched for vanity, and that I care for nothing in the world so much as my own dear person, which I am perpetually admiring in the glass.” And what is he, says the chairman ? A player, Samuel replied. Here the laugh was louder. Mr. William being called upon, delivered himself thus : “ I am not quite so happy, Sir, in my service as the two gentlemen who have spoken before me. My master has but an indifferent opinion of me. He was saying with much warmth t’other day to his lady, that he believed there was not such another fellow in the kingdom as myself, for making the most of a service. There is not, says he, a transaction in the house, but Will makes a pecuniary advantage of it ; not a bill paid of any kind, or to any person, but he

he has a slice out of it ; nay, if I send down five or ten shillings, in charity to a poor object, 'tis ten to one but he squeezes something out of it." What is your master, Mr. William ? says the chairman. He answered, a clerk in the T—y. At this the laugh became very loud and long ; and the chairman concluded the subject by observing, how blind men were to their own failings, and how ready to censure them in others. " I am convinced, says he, that our cloth would not be half so bespattered, if a man before he condemns a servant for any fault, would enquire if it was not a principal ingredient in his own character."

The excellent reflections which Dick made at this, and other times, on this topic, might have done honour to any gentleman of higher rank, and more cultivated education.

I make no doubt but every master of a family would be shocked, if he was told that his servants played constantly at cards in an evening. The idleness of the habit, and the dangerous consequences, would frighten

him, and force him immediately to dismiss them from his service. But pray why do all these horrid consequences attend the greasy kitchen cards, any more than the spruce pack in the parlour? Is whist a whit more innocent than all-fours? Or cribbridge more fatal than quadrille? If the master plays only for amusement, why not the servant? If he plays for more than he can afford, how can he have the face to condemn his servant? For my own part, I always thought it scandalous for servants to play at cards, except at Christmas-time; but what a temptation is it for them to become card-players, when ten thousand sober regular good families set them the example *every night in the year.*

Drinking is a vice never to be over-looked in a servant.—I think I can say, with truth, that it is not a common vice among them.—The reason for this may be, that it would ruin their characters, and soon disqualify them from doing their business. But I take the principal reason for their not running into this excess to be this, That it is not a common practice among their betters.—The worst broken

broken head I ever had in my life, was for stealing a rummer glass full of burgundy,—the fact was this;—my master, who was a single man, and always dined by himself, and never rose from table without a bottle of that wine to his own share, was one day suddenly called out; but, returning sooner than expected, caught me in the forementioned situation, with the glass at my mouth, enjoying the delicious draught. I immediately received the reward of my presumption, which was a wound three inches long on the side of my head, made by a small cane that he always walked with. But what gave me more anguish than my bodily suffering, was to see him finish six bottles of that very wine the same night, with an Oxfordshire baronet.

It is very certain that there are in the world many worthless and abandoned servants, who behave rudely, ungratefully, saucily, roguishly, and villainously to the families into which they are received: but it always will be so in large bodies of men; there will be some who disgrace their calling. I wish with all my heart that the number

number was not so great, and that more of our fraternity preferred yarn and hob-nails to pumps and white stockings. I am convinced it would be better both for servants and masters. If there were not such a choice of servants, and such a variety of places, the servants would be cautious how they left their places, and the masters more willing to make them easy and happy. But every one now-a-days must have a footman. There is scarce a tradesman of any likelihood, but will have this appendage, to attend his lady in her visits, or to ride out with him on a Sunday. Those who may very well afford to keep one, will stretch farther, and have two, who make a pretty figure behind an equipage, and denominate the owner to be of superior quality. It is owing to the great number of livery servants, that we hear so frequently tales and stories to their discredit, which I will take for granted are true; and shall, by way of answer and counterbalance to them, briefly relate my own unhappy story.

I entered at fifteen into the service of the parson of the parish wherein I was born; and

and though I got very little wages, I had much good council given me, which I have been the better for, under a thousand difficulties and misfortunes. At twenty I came to town, passed through a variety of services, took care to be the better for them all, and was in the fifty-fifth year of my age, happy in the service of a merchant and insurer in the city, who was a gentleman of extraordinary character, and supposed to be worth an immense fortune. He appeared to be a grave, regular, sober man, and professed a more than ordinary regard for his servants, some of whom had lived with him a long time, and particularly an old nurse, who had been in the family near fifty years. I was at that time, as I said before, in my fifty-fifth year, and had saved, in the course of forty years labour, three hundred and seventy pounds ; which, by the advice of all my fellow-servants, I had, at my first entrance into the family, placed in my master's hands ; who, as they said, might be prevailed on to take it ; and, if he did, would give five per cent. interest, which would be punctually paid every half year. I did so, and received the interest the first half year.

And

And so fond was I, with the rest of the inhabitants of the kitchen, to make our advantage of this generous usage, that no sooner had we raised 20l. but it was thrown into the honourable bank, to increase and multiply.

I will not be tedious ; it was in the month of January 1752, that we were, to the number of seven, enjoying ourselves by a large fire, and drinking our good master's health in a bowl of punch we had clubbed for : he was gone to Deal that day, to take leave of an East-India captain ;—we were sitting, I say, enjoying ourselves, and thinking of the handsome provision we had made for our old age, when we were roused from our golden dream by a smart rap at the door, and the entrance of a forward attorney's clerk, who no sooner entered the house, but he told us, our master was broke for a vast sum of money ; that his affairs were quite desperate, and that he was obliged to fly to France. This was a thunderbolt to us all, and proved an immediate one to the poor old nurse, who had upwards of six hundred pound in her master's hands. She immediately

diateley fell into a fit, and was happily delivered from all her care, by dying that very night. Some of us were so enraged, that we were for seizing the plate, &c. but the lawyer soon put a stop to our violence, by telling us that such a step would be fatal to us. We were turned off the next day, with the miserable reflection of having lost all that we were worth in the world, which amounted in the whole to eighteen hundred and fifty pounds.

This tragic scene will naturally introduce the article of perquisites, the grand cause of that clamour which is raised against us.

The custom of giving vails is said to be peculiar to England, but I am informed that it prevails in other countries, especially in Germany. It takes its rise from a very natural desire in servants to get what they eat; and from an artificial practice in masters to encrease the value of their places: to this may be added that in great families, especially those of the nobility, this custom is a kind of dragon or bug-bear to keep off poor dependants, and the vast multitude of hun-

gry half gentry, who know not where to get
a dinner.

If masters, from any motive whatever con-
tribute to this practice they are answerable for
it. I would only just ask, if they don't go
with a kind of pleasure to the door, after a
guest, to see whether he gives or not ; and
if they do not express more satisfaction, the
more liberal they observe their friends to be
on these occasions ?

The excellent author of my motto has
told us very seriously that some advantages
are absolutely necessary ; besides the wages
stipulated, in order to make our old age
comfortable ; very often are we reproached
with want of prudence in not making a pro-
vision for that helpless state. How is that
to be done ? Not from our wages only, that
is impossible. It must arise from our vails,
fifty years ago five pound per annum was the
common wages of a family servant ; which
would go as far as ten now. At present se-
ven or eight pound is the general pay. Let
any one calculate what a footman can save
out of eight pound a year, which is to find
him

him shirts, stockings, shoes, periwigs, &c. and to defray two occasional, but very expensive articles, viz. the apothecary's bill, and lying out of place. He must be a very heathful person, and a very good œconomist, who can, under these strait circumstances, save forty shillings every year of his life, which after forty years labour, will raise him the sum of fourscore pounds, to support him under the weaknesses of old age.

The gentry do not consider how they tempt us, with good living and fine liveries, to leave the plough, the loom, the scythe, the ax, &c. which would turn to much better, and more reputable account, had we not that folly in our nature (something like which we now and then discover in our betters) of being caught by a laced waistcoat or golden shoulder-knot. They don't consider that they have the very prime of our life. Who will take an old servant? Nobody. If he has saved nothing to support himself he must crawl to the workhouse; if he has got a little matter together, his lot will not be quite so bad, and he may end his days with an old she mate in a sorry alehouse, or a

petty chandler's shop. They don't consider what constant labour that of a servant is, every day in the year the same task is to be performed, no holidays, no vacations, except now and then leave obtained, with difficulty, to see a play, or to pay a visit to a friend, or to a country man.

Besides the bodily labours which we undergo, it is incredible to think what a well disposed servant suffers in his mind in the space of twenty or thirty years, from pride, insolence, moroseness, avarice, peevishness, hastiness, meanness, &c. not to mention the absurd messages, and long-winded compliments he is to carry every day, and the confounded lies he is obliged to tell many tolerably genteel family.

Surely some little advantages, besides wages, are due to servants on these considerations : which, among persons of generous minds, ought to raise them advocates and friends. The ladies, I think, cannot fail to be the first in this honourable class, where pleasure and happiness is generally promoted by their servants, from the time that they bring the morning

morning chocolate, and receive the orders of the day to the long midnight hour in which the flambeau is extinguished. Maiden ladies and widows, who are housekeepers, are particularly engaged to patronise us, when they consider their own timid dispositions, and how uncomfortable a thing it is to go to bed without a man in the house.

It is said and urged as a most forcible argument against us, that this vile custom of vails has destroyed all the hospitality in the land. A man cannot have a relation of small fortune come to dine with him, but he must pay the servant a shilling for his dinner. I don't find that this argument is urged by the gentleman who gives the dinners, but by the gentlemen who want them. I fancy masters of families are, in general, willing that matters should stand upon their present footing ; concluding that a poor relation, or an unhappy friend, who can eat two or three pound of fish, fowl, and flesh, and wash them down with two or three pints of wine, is not much injured by paying a shilling for it.

" Oh !

" Oh ! but it is past bearing in people of quality and distinction to let loose half a dozen fellows at you, as you go out of the house after dinner." Oh ! but it is incredible to think on the other hand what a number of bold guests they would have at their tables every day if they did not do so ; there are so many single gentlemen of small fortunes and large assurance about this town who would make so free with noblemen's tables, that, if it were not for the parti-coloured centinels, it is certain the chop-houses would almost be forsaken.

I am well convinced therefore that this affair of cutting off the vails, notwithstanding all the efforts in the north, will never take place in England, unless it is begun by the nobility and gentry of distinction ; and how likely they are to break thro' a long established custom, and one of apparent convenience to themselves, let any man of sense determine.

I would confine my argument to families in the middle way of life.

If

If gentlemen are really desirous to see their poor relations, which I'll venture to say, is not the case with one in ten, a good cup of chocolate in the morning, or a dish of tea in the afternoon will be no disagreeable repast, as they may in most families, so far indulge, without paying any thing for it.—But if am hired to wait on a family at so much a year, and there comes in four or five times a week five or six of these poor couzins, have not I three times more trouble in whetting knives, cleaning of glasses, &c. and am I not also obliged to be twice as quick and ready at the table? “ Well? and so you ought, it is answered; they are your masters guests, and it is your duty to wait on them.” So I will once and away, but if they make such good use of my master's hospitality, as to come often and give nothing, then they make me *their* servants, and that was not the condition of the obligation.

Notwithstanding all this cry about the great hardship put upon poor kinsmen, by this custom of vails, every servant of experience knows that they do often come and see their rich

rich relations, and after a very plentiful meal, either walk out coolly without putting their hands to their pockets, or else run out in a violent hurry and pretend not to see the servant at the door.

At my first coming to town I lived with a genteel and reputable family in the city: a Cornish squire, his lady and two daughters spent a whole winter with us. Every moment of my time was taken up. I brushed the squire's coat, combed his wig, and cleaned his shoes every day. Four times a week I was sent by the ladies to the blue-periwig in old Bond-street, with messages to my lady *Penlizard* who lodged there. All this I chearfully did, besides my common business in the house, expecting to be handsomely rewarded for my great trouble and uncommon diligence. Upon their departure the squire gave me half a crown, the lady two shillings, and the misses one shilling a-peice.

For my part I am not at all anxious, and I would have none of my brethren sollicitous lest they should be deprived of that part of their

their profits from which only they are able to make a provision for the wants of old age ; for these two reasons, viz. that it is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to set limits to voluntary donations ; and, if it were possible to do so, it is neither the desire nor interest of those whose authority and example would be most prevalent to that purpose.

The most severe enemy we have will surely allow us to save something out of our income for a latter day, nay would censure us if we did not. I always desire to be understood as speaking of servants in common families, who are the most numerous, and have no prospect of future advantages by places, situation, or promotion of any kind, which the servants of the nobility have, but only depend on their own frugality for a support in time of age and infirmity. And I would ask if a servant may not be allowed to save five pound out of his income, for that purpose, every year ; by which after labouring forty years he would have 200l. to maintain him till he died.

This cannot be construed an unreasonable or extravagant demand; but how is it to answer if our vails are to be destroyed? Can five pounds a year be saved out of eight? It is a general maxim with us, and it is a modest one, viz. that a servant should be able to save all his wages by the advantage of perquisites. I have set it lower, and if the world will not allow us this benefit, they may as well allow us none at all, and so leave us to the most miserable of all states, old age and poverty.

If ever our affairs were to become the subject of public enquiry, which it is not very natural to suppose; I hope the foregoing hints may be useful to some able advocate in our cause. And I think he will add, that it cannot be right to depress a set of people, from whence a body of twenty or thirty thousand fighting men might be drawn, to serve in the imminent danger of their king and country.

I shall conclude with what I set out at first, and repeat that I write these observations
for

for the use of sober, honest, diligent, good servants, not as a foundation for insolence or pertness, but as hints to enable them to say something for themselves. I shall rejoice if any good purpose is served hereby with regard either to servants or masters ; for myself, I am quite unconcerned in any thing that is intended or may be executed against our body of people. I have but a very few years to live, and, remembering the good advice and excellent example of my first master, am every day preparing myself for that place where there is neither servant nor master, and where those who are now first may be last.

The reader will smile, perhaps, or may laugh and sneer, to see such a conclusion as this : but I am not ashamed to acquaint him, that I never in all my life wilfully neglected my duty to God, or suffered myself to mispend my Sunday, tho' I often had it in my power to do so, which I attribute to the good principles I imbibed in my first service.

And here let me conclude with a matter of fact, which I hope will have its effect on our superiors, that, in the space of forty five years,

years, in which I served fourteen masters, all members of the church of England, I was never shewed the way to church but by three of them; viz. my first master, a bencher of the Temple, and a weaver in Spital-fields.

OLIVER GREY.



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